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A BOOK ON NATIONAL DEFENSE¹

BY FREDERIC R. COUDERT

It has recently become apparent that the American people are interested in the question of national defense. A few months ago a book devoted to this subject would have been read by a few experts and eschewed by the mass of our people as dealing with an uninteresting and academic question. The propaganda for general arbitration and the usual insouciance of the public regarding this question had combined to make it almost impossible to arouse any interest in the national defense.

If, at present, there has been manifested both in Congress and the general public some awakening of our need of military preparedness, it is due to the fact that the inefficacy of treaties, the futility of Hague Conventions, and the uselessness of elaborate military codes were effectively demonstrated by the destruction of neutralized Belgium and the methods of warfare on land and sea since indulged in on the ground of alleged "necessity."

Gen. Francis Vinton Greene, therefore, presents at a peculiarly opportune time, an able, suggestive, and most interesting little book on *The Present Military Situation in the United States*. General Greene's experience as a soldier from the days when he was an *attaché* to the Secretary of War in Grant's administration, ranging through his experience in the Russo-Turkish war and in the Spanish and Philippine wars, have qualified him to write knowingly and scientifically on the subject. He deals frankly with the main difficulty, namely, the widespread belief in this country that the United States will never be engaged in any serious military operations, and that our geographic position and our pacific intentions absolve us from the need of maintaining any impor-

¹ *The Present Military Situation in the United States*. By General F. V. Greene. New York. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915.

tant military establishment; small words, the general belief that there is no military question.

General Greene meets this situation squarely by showing that there is an inherent probability, in the light of our history and because of the present conditions in Europe, of our being compelled to confront international complexities which may well result in war. National interest will, he shows, always be a dominant consideration, and mere sentimental clamor for peace will not keep us out of war as long as our policies are based upon the maintenance of our interests, of our commerce, and of our rights under the law of nations. He cites the little-known episode of Washington having refused to take part in a joint expedition with the French for the taking of Canada in 1778 because he feared, in the event of its success, the French would desire to remain in Canada; and he quotes as profoundly true the saying of Washington in this connection:

It is a maxim founded on the universal experience of mankind, that no nation is to be trusted farther than it is bound by its interests; and no prudent statesman or politician will venture to depart from it.

He considers the possibility of difficulties with England; and he is too close a student of history and too wise a military man to assent to the assumption that the nations of Europe will come out of the present war too exhausted and too weakened to be dangerous to us. He knows that the victorious nations at least will be militarily stronger than ever, just as the United States was at the acme of its military strength when, after four years of Civil War, it bade Louis Napoleon depart from Mexico.

If England comes triumphant out of this war, she will not allow her subjects to be killed, and their property to be wrecked, in Mexico. . . . She will more probably say to us: "You restore order in Mexico, or we will." . . . So that we will either have to eat our Monroe Doctrine or intervene in Mexico for an indefinite period.

Then, again, there is the possibility of commercial clashes throughout the world. On the hypothesis that Germany may come out of the war victorious, is it not probable that she will desire a base in the West Indies? Since Grant's administration, have we not refused to purchase St. Thomas ourselves and yet been unwilling that another nation should buy it? Is it reasonable to suppose that Germany will acquiesce for ever in the Monroe Doctrine; and, even if defeated, she will recover with amazing rapidity.

General Greene cites the extraordinary little book of Freiherr von Edelsheim as demonstrating that at least the military authorities in Germany have contemplated, as a probability, military operations against the United States, whose alleged truculent attitude they affect to resent.

Very careful consideration is given to the Japanese situation and to the attitude adopted, especially by the legislators and people of California as to the Japanese race—an attitude so incompatible with their dignity and so insulting to their civilization that, if continued in, it may well result in an attack upon us. He says:

If, as a result of our supreme folly in dealing with Japan as we do not deal with other nations, the Japanese shall be goaded into war with us regardless of its ultimate consequences to them, the first blow would probably be struck by Japan before any declaration of war; it would be dealt with a swiftness and a certainty of which our people have no conception, and according to a definite plan carefully prepared in advance.

He explains what their plan of campaign might well be, and thinks that our people should understand these facts so that "we may think that it becomes us to treat the Japanese with the same politeness that they treat us and that we show to other nations."

The question of arbitration as a solvent for all international controversies is discussed and its inadequacy to meet certain situations dwelt upon. The beneficent results of the Mexican War and the Spanish War are shown.

He explains the ease with which, were our fleet overcome, a great naval power—and it is pointed out that since the Revolutionary War we have had no struggle with any great power, the War of 1812 being only an incident for England, engaged as she was at the time in her death struggle with Napoleon—could land 250,000 men within the vicinity of New York, and the absurdly helpless condition in which we should then find ourselves. This he demonstrates by the last report of the Secretary of War, from which he cites some extracts in closing his book. These extracts show that in continental United States we had in the mobile army on June 30, 1914, 4,701 officers and 87,781 men, and that a great part of our militia would be unavailable for immediate war purpose; that no provision has been made for a reserve and that it would require some six months to prepare to resist invasion. General Greene, therefore, recommends that, for the present, the only

thing to do "is to get squarely behind the modest programme of the Secretary of War."

This book is couched in admirable style, is free from all rhetoric, and is the most sober and significant publication that I have as yet seen on this subject. It is so readable and so brief that it should have a wide publication and should certainly prove of great educational value—one which no citizen can, at the present moment, afford to ignore.

General Greene rightly concludes:

Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just. Aye, true indeed! But quarrels there yet will be. And no nation unarmed can enforce its quarrel, however just.

FREDERIC R. COUDERT.